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ABSTRACT

The lack of attention to the student marriage relationship and its impact is documented and guidelines for an outreach program involving married students are presented. Objectives of such a program include: (1) to study student marriages and define more clearly the psychological variables that constitute a growing, healthy marriage, and (2) to discover ways that married students may increasingly become their own growth facilitators, within both the marriage relationship and the larger married student culture. Several projects are now in progress to implement these goals. The first is a ten-week experimental seminar group, conducted with five normal couples residing in married housing. An Interest Opinion survey was also conducted among all residents of married student housing. The survey was concerned with housing, social organizations, and social activities. Thirdly, about 40 couples agreed to be interviewed about their experiences as married students. Fourthly, the authors are directing the creation of two experimental Social Centers in married student housing. (Author/KJ)

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A NEW PROGRAM FOR MARRIED STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The lack of attention to the student marriage relationship and its impact is documented and guidelines for an outreach program involving married students are presented. The purpose of such a program is to identify the major psycho-social needs of the married student and development of a social environment that will maximize the attainment of these needs and minimize campus mental health problems in this group of students. Some pilot projects now in progress are described.

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Introduction

Since the end of World War II, the number of married college students has constantly increased. In 1940, married students were relatively rare, whereas in 1965 they accounted for between seventeen and twenty-four percent of college and university populations. Assistance offered by the university to this rapidly expanding student group has been primarily that of a benevolent landlord. The good landlord provides comfortable, economical apartment dwellings with a modicum of extra facilities. A volleyball or horseshoe court for the husband, a laundry for the housewife, and a playground for the children typically comprise the university's offerings. Sometimes an experimental nursery, usually associated with a child development program, is also available. Consequently, the university, in its fatherly landlord role, has left the married student couple alone to cultivate its own social and educational growth.

Relatively little attention has been paid to the student marriage relationship and how it is affected by the university experience. Occasionally a social scientist conducts a survey and derives a descriptive characterization of what it is like to be simultaneously a student and a spouse. Counseling centers and campus psychiatrists deal with a small portion of married students undergoing unusual amounts of stress. Rare is the professional within the university who actually engages himself in helping the typical student spouse make the marriage more meaningful in conjunction with the academic experience.

Literature Survey

Interest in the married student population is scarcely reflected in the psychological and student personnel literature. Barely a handful of publications deal directly with the married students' lot. Most of the studies represent a survey approach, and their results present descriptive characteristics usually of the male married student.

Altman (1960) surveyed 79 deans of students of various colleges and universities to collect their opinions on the effect of undergraduate marriage upon education. The most frequently stated position was that marriage increases the student's application to academic pursuits but detracts from his participation in non-academic activities such as student government and student clubs.

Several recent studies lead objective credence to these deans' positions on the married student. Chamblis (1961) administered an opinionnaire to 366 married students at a state university. He reported 79% of his sample as stating that present housing was unsatisfactory. Of his sample, 46% of the male students' wives had fulltime jobs. 61% of the students stated that their grades had been favorably affected by marriage. Finally, 92% expressed belief that they should have married at the time they did.

DeLisle (1965) presents demographic data on the married student wife. Surveying several universities she found that 50% of married undergraduate women are under 25 years of age; 30% are 35 or older. Three in five of the women sampled had been married less than five years, and one in four has been married over 10 years. Approximately one-half

of married student wives have no children although 1/5 of them have three or more children. The majority of student wives in DeLisle's study had initiated a college education prior to marriage, and 1/3 continued to go to school after marriage. 80% of the women sampled reported that their husband's attitude represents the most important influence in helping them continue their education. Surveying a large sample of married, male undergraduates, Oppelt (1965) arrived at several interesting conclusions. First, he found that the men in his sample reported being more concerned about financial problems than other potential marital difficulties. Secondly, the wives of Oppelt's subjects were primarily involved with supporting their husband, not raising children or not getting an education for themselves. In short, the student wife as Oppelt found her is more likely to receive a "Ph.T." degree (Putting Hubby Through) than a B.A. degree. Thirdly, married students tend to participate significantly less in all types of campus activities than do unmarried students; they are, however, from the husband's point of view, satisfied with their amount of campus participation. Finally, married students make significantly less use of the university counseling center and student personnel services.

Using the Lock Marital Adjustment Scale, Aller (1963) attempted to identify some of the major problem areas in student marriages and relate them to academic achievement. 100 married student couples with at least one spouse enrolled in the university were sampled. The California Personality Inventory (C.P.I.) and an openended questionnaire complemented the Lock Scale as research instruments. The major problems listed by both sexes as causing most difficulty in the marriage were stubbornness, lack of finances, nagging or criticism, in-laws, and selfishness, in that order of importance. Married students were found to have a higher

grade point average (GPA) than non-married students; and parents had higher GPA's than non-parents. The marital adjustment score was higher for both husbands and wives who indicated financial adequacy in their marriage than for those student couples perplexed by money problems. Marital adjustment was positively and significantly related to academic achievement for the husbands in the sample; for the wives the relationship was negative but not significant. Self-control and responsibility measured on the CPI were found to be positively and significantly related to Lock Marital Adjustment scores.

Only rarely have investigators moved beyond descriptive analysis and attempted to assess the particular social and educational problems of married students. Even less frequently have researchers utilized their data to suggest tactics that would maximize growth in the student marital relationship.

Hewer and Neubeck (1964) investigated the attitudes of college freshmen concerning the roles of husband and wife in student marriages. They found that college freshmen of both sexes most frequently accept the traditional nurturent and dependent role for the student wife. The majority of the student sample also believed that the husband is primarily responsible for the financial support of the student couple or family, although freshmen women are less accepting of this belief than freshmen men. Hewer and Neubeck's results suggest that a major conflict in student marriages may be the coping with the role reversal involved when a student wife supports the newly married couple.

Schab (1966) investigated the similarities and differences of two randomly selected groups of married, male students. The sample

consisted of 182 students, 84 undergraduates and 98 graduates. The group trend was for all males sampled to report an ambivalent attitude about the role of the student wife. On the one hand, the subjects preferred a wife with a college education and hoped that their wives might seek continuing education. On the other hand, they expressed an opinion that the student wife's place should be in the home, caring for the children and her mate. The significant finding of Schab's study is that graduate males tended to allow their wives a more real equality. The graduate males expressed more acceptance of their wives being in school and were found to have significantly larger proportion of spouses actually pursuing their own educational goals. Schab interpreted this finding to mean that married graduate males are more mature than undergraduate males in that they are willing to accept a women as an equal in the home, in the classroom, or on the job.

Aller's study (cited above) is one of the few which presents specific recommendations for improving the married student's educational experience. His suggestions are as follows: 1) provisions should be made for both husband and wife to continue their education; 2) marriage counseling services should be provided for married student families on college and university campuses; 3) married student families should be made aware of all available student personnel services; 4) counselors, educators and parents should give special considerations to methods of helping young people develop attributes of self-control and responsibility which were found to be significantly related to marital adjustment;

5) married students should be counseled to postpone the arrival of children until educational goals are nearly completed; 6) much more research should be conducted on the relationship between grade point average and marital adjustment among student wives.

Finally, Dressel's (1965) recommendations are particularly relevant to improving the married student's college experience. He found that married students participate significantly less in non-academic college activities than do non-married students. Addressing student personnel workers in his paper, Dressel cautioned that we should not use the married student's decreased activity in student affairs as an excuse for paying less attention to him. In fact, he suggested several guidelines for enriching the married student's educational experience: 1) survey the married student situation on given campuses; 2) allocate necessary funds and staff for a separate activity program for married students; 3) initiate social programs in married student housing; and 4) identify the most likely source of program participant and workers.

A Married Student Outreach Program

In response to this deficit on the part of student personnel and counseling professionals, the authors have recently developed a set of guidelines for an outreach program involving married students at Colorado State University. The overall purpose of our work is the identification of major psycho-social needs of the married student and the subsequent facilitation of a social environment that maximizes the attainment of these needs. More specifically our objectives include:

1. To study student marriages and define more clearly the psychological variables that constitute a growing, healthy marriage.
2. To study norms and expectations in the prevailing married student culture and determine how this culture enhances or depresses mental health in student marriages.
3. To construct instruments that accurately assess psychological growth in student marriages, and instruments which measure the reciprocal interaction between the student couple and the married student culture.
4. To discover ways that married students may increasingly become their own growth facilitators, within both the marriage relationship and the larger married student culture.
5. To develop techniques for professional campus mental health workers which will allow them to serve as consultants to the psycho-social growth process in the married student community.

Projects in Progress

The authors' attempt to implement these goals at Colorado State University has resulted in several projects. First, a ten week experimental seminar group was conducted with five normal student couples residing in C.S.U. married housing. This semi-structured group focussed on the typical developmental problems of a growing student marriage. Examples of discussion themes were: the process of constructive marital fighting, emotional giving and taking, the need for intimacy (sexual and non-sexual), childlike feelings and play in marriage, finances and the student marriage, and the need for separateness in marriage. Each couple had a chance to view itself on closed circuit

TV with the rest of the group serving as interaction consultants. Recently, several student couples have requested that the Counseling Center offer similar marriage seminars again. Plans are underway to provide three student seminars in the Spring of 1969. Apparently the couples participating in the first experimental group communicated their satisfaction with the experience to their neighbors.

Second, an Interest-Opinion survey was conducted among all residents of C.S.U. married student housing, roughly 55% of the couples sampled returned the questionnaire and we are presently tabulating the results. The survey served several functions: (1) It afforded a formal opportunity for student couples to complain or compliment the university housing office about living conditions and facilities. (2) It attempted to locate formal and informal social organizations within the married student community. (3) It asked couples what activities they wanted initiated in their courts and which ones they would be willing to help organize.

Third, approximately 40 couples responding to the Interest-Opinion survey indicated their willingness to be interviewed about their experiences as married students. This sample of student couples will be contacted in the Spring and Summer of 1969 as a means of accomplishing Objectives "1" and "2" listed above. These couples will also be asked to take several marital adjustment and satisfaction scales currently available.

Fourth, the authors are directing the creation of two experimental Social Centers in C.S.U. married student housing. Each Social Center will be run by a committee of married student residents for a period of 10-12 weeks in the Spring of 1969. The authors will act

as consultants to the steering committees and take responsibility for evaluation of the project's overall usefulness to the married student community.

Finally, the authors are in the process of preparing a grant request for federal funding to continue the development of outreach programs for C.S.U. married students. One of the goals of this proposed project is the training of selected student couples as social-educational facilitators within the married student community.

A Final Word

Recently Morrill and Oetting (1969) inquired of 635 university counseling centers about their participation in "outreach programs." "Outreach programs" were defined as activities taking place outside the center itself, involving interaction university populations (e.g., married students) in order to create change. Counseling center directors were asked to check from a list of 26 outreach programs those that their centers were engaged in and rank those programs checked in order of importance. Of the 397 centers returning the questionnaire, only 30 reported participation in any married student programs and they ranked this participation as 25th out of the 26 programs listed in importance. This current data simply underscores the authors' earlier assertion that married students are a forgotten people in campus mental health work. It is the authors' hope that this paper will stimulate student personnel and counseling professionals to take a new look at the married student population, and seriously consider ways that they may better serve these students. Finally, this paper may facilitate communication between professionals already interested and/or working in the area.

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